



News Release

For immediate release: June 10, 2009

(09-097)

Contacts: Tim Church, Communications Office
Allison Cook, Communications Office

360-236-4077
360-236-4022

West Nile virus: new online reporting tool to help track dead birds

Another season of monitoring begins across the state

OLYMPIA — Mosquito season is here, bringing increased risk of West Nile virus. The Department of Health has a new online dead bird reporting system to help track this disease.

This [new tool](http://www.doh.wa.gov/wnv) (www.doh.wa.gov/wnv) makes it easier than ever for people to let health officials know when they find a dead bird. Testing mosquitoes and dead birds is one of the ways we track the virus in our state. Information provided online automatically goes to state and local health agencies. There are pictures of birds online so people can easily identify the bird they've found.

"It's important to track West Nile virus so we can keep people informed and they can take steps to prevent getting sick," said Gregg Grunenfelder, assistant secretary for the state health department's Environmental Health division. "This new system helps identify where West Nile activity is in our state. It also lends a hand to counties where resources are limited."

In 2008 West Nile virus made three people sick in our state and was detected in eight counties. It was also found in more than 40 horses, 24 dead birds, and nearly 60 mosquito samples. Nearly all of those positive samples were in eastern Washington. Last year was Washington's most active season for West Nile virus since monitoring began in 2001.

The state Department of Health asks people to watch for dead birds and report them using this online system or contact their [local health agency](http://www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm). Crows, ravens, jays, magpies, and hawks are particularly important to report because they often die from West Nile infection. Dead bird monitoring is encouraged from June through November.

Select birds will be tested this season. That information, along with reports of dead birds will be mapped. State and local health agencies will use this information to identify any unusual increases or clusters of bird deaths. Knowing these areas helps with prevention and control strategies — it shows where people might be at higher risk of West Nile infection.

There are a few pieces of information to have when reporting a dead bird — the nearest address or intersection where the bird is located, estimated length of time the bird's been there, condition of the bird, and suspected cause of death. If this information isn't available, you can still report it.

West Nile virus can cause flu-like symptoms and sometimes leads to meningitis or encephalitis, although most people bitten by infected mosquitoes never get sick. The virus is most dangerous for children, the elderly, and people with weak immune systems.

The state health department urges people to protect themselves against West Nile virus by taking steps to avoid mosquito bites and reduce mosquito habitat around your home:

- Limit outdoor activities between dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are the most active.
- Wear long-sleeve shirts, long pants, and hats when going into mosquito-infested areas.
- Use an effective repellent on exposed skin; follow directions on the product label.
- Make sure window and door screens fit tight; repair or replace broken screens.
- Eliminate standing water in containers — buckets, old tires, wading pools, and birdbaths where mosquitoes can lay eggs. Also, fix leaky outdoor faucets and sprinklers.

More information on West Nile virus prevention and control is on the [state health department's Web site](http://www.doh.wa.gov/wnv) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/wnv>). Regular updates are available by calling the toll-free West Nile virus information line, 1-866-78-VIRUS.

###